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Analysis of North Vietnamese Propaganda Regarding Nam DinhI. Introduction

In their "Report on US War Crimes in Nam Dinh City," a part of the propaganda barrage concerning the "investigation of US imperialists' war crimes," the North Vietnamese have released a number of statistics and allegations concerning the US bombing of Nam Dinh in 1965-66. Many of these statements have also been reported in Harrison Salisbury's series of articles in The New York Times. *(insert 1)* [The purpose of this section is to demonstrate the accuracy of the North Vietnamese allegations concerning damage to civilian areas and to use this information to evaluate the civilian casualty-causing aspects of the Rolling Thunder program.]

Nam Dinh is a textile-producing city approximately 47 miles south of Hanoi normally inhabited by about 90,000 people, although partial evacuation has reduced the population to a reported 20,000. Other than one large and one moderate-size textile mill, Nam Dinh has no major industries. The city is situated, however, along the infiltration-important Hanoi-Vinh Railroad Line, and is served by Routes 21 from Phu Ly and 10 from Haiphong. A transshipment facility on a tributary of the Red River makes it possible to transfer goods from coastal craft to the railroad. Major targets included in

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[] Nam Dinh are the POL storage area [] 25X1A

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power plant [] transshipment facility, textile mill complex,

railroad yards, and several storage areas. Nam Dinh is heavily defended by AAA sites and is within range of several SAM sites.

(insert 1) The major purpose of this section is to compare the North Vietnamese statistics and allegations concerning Nam Dinh with known damage to the city as observed in aerial photography. In addition, US strike information --

dates of missions and targets -- has been compared, as far as the data

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permits, with North Vietnamese claims.

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Table 1 compares US and North Vietnamese reported missions against Nam Dinh targets, although not comprehensively. Most US armed reconnaissance missions against the city are not reported in sufficient detail to be included. Six of the dates of raids reported by the North Vietnamese agree with the US list, while raids reported by the North Vietnamese on five other dates do not appear on the US list. Apparently substantial civilian casualties did not occur on dates of US raids not reported by the North Vietnamese -- 2-4 July 1965, 28 April 1966, 13 May 1966, 12 June 1966, and 16 August 1966.

II. Analysis of North Vietnamese Charges

Propaganda Statement

"The April 14, 1966 air raid over Hang Thao Street (Silk Street) was one of the biggest deliberate US attacks on human lives. ... killing 49 people, ...wounding 135 people."

Comment

On 14 April 1966, 8 US A4 jets attacked the Nam Dinh Transshipment

25X1A Facility [redacted] with eight 2000 pound bombs. This facility consists of a narrow strip of wharf area and support buildings along the river bank and is served by a rail spur. Directly behind it is a provincial warehouse and a densely populated residential area, presumably occupied by workers from the nearby textile plants, rice mill, and food processing plant.

Post strike photography reveals that most of the 2000 pound bombs fell within an area 500-1000 feet northwest of the target in the densely populated civilian residential-residential commercial area. While other raids have

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caused civilian casualties in this and other areas of Nam Dinh, both US and North Vietnamese sources indicate that this raid was the most damaging from the civilian casualty standpoint. Although it would be nearly impossible to bomb the transshipment facility without causing some civilian casualties and damage, the reasons for such serious bombing errors are unclear. Efforts to evade heavy defensive fire from AAA or SAM sites may have been a contributing factor. In addition, it is possible that pilots may have been attempting to suppress small arms fire from rooftops in the civilian area. Poor weather over the target could also have been a factor.

A similar situation occurred in Phu Ly when the railroad yard and port facilities were repeatedly struck. Both are narrow targets in the midst of a heavily populated area. As a consequence of those raids, the downtown area of Phu Ly was all but completely destroyed, and, based on the Nam Dinh experience, an estimated 575 civilians were killed or wounded.

Propaganda Statement

"...881 dwelling houses (accounting for 13 percent of the city housing) with an area of 86,847 square meters were destroyed, leaving 12,464 homeless."

Comment

Analysis of 12 October 1966 post strike photography of Nam Dinh reveals that approximately 65,140 square meters of roof cover within one nautical mile of the center of town were destroyed or severely damaged. This amounts to 12.7 percent of the total civilian-residential and residential-

commercial roof cover within one nautical mile of the center of Nam Dinh. By selecting a typical housing block as a sample of the number of distinct structures per unit of roof cover, it was estimated that the average amount of roof cover per building was 59.7 square meters. Using this estimate, approximately 1090 buildings were destroyed or severely damaged. In addition, it is likely that many other dwellings received substantial damage not discernable from photography.

Propaganda Statement

"The US imperialists also attacked the dike surrounding the city in an attempt to sabotage the peaceful work of the population."

Comment

The river banks are diked all the way through the city of Nam Dinh. Consequently, it would be impossible to strike the Transshipment Facility or POL Storage Facility on one bank or the ferry landing on the other without risking some damage to dikes. The North Vietnamese do not claim any casualties or severe damage from dike breaches.

Propaganda Statement

"During the 33 above said air attacks against Nam Dinh, ... 89 persons were killed, ...and 405 wounded....

Comment

These casualty estimates do not appear exaggerated. Based on casualty experience from the World War II bombing of Japan, post strike estimates of civilian casualties (includes both killed and wounded) range from 272 if there

was prior warning up to 2720 if no warning was given. In a breakdown (see Table 1) of 6 separate major raids on Nam Dinh and an adjacent hamlet, the North Vietnamese list a total of 91 killed and 107 wounded.

III. Findings

The statistical information concerning damage to civilian areas in the North Vietnamese "Report on US War Crimes in Nam Dinh City" is accurate. Total damage claims fall remarkably close to estimates based on post strike photography. Furthermore, reported casualties fall within casualty estimates made by use of the World War II Japanese bombing experiences. However, no accurate basis exists to evaluate North Vietnamese statements regarding total sorties flown or ordnance expended against Nam Dinh as US data on armed reconnaissance strikes against fixed targets are not easily recoverable.

It is significant to note that a substantial share of the civilian casualties and damage to civilian areas inflicted on Nam Dinh occurred in only two raids -- 13 April and 18 May 1966. These raids, both on the Transshipment Facility, caused 208 civilian casualties. Indeed, it is unlikely that civilian casualties could have been avoided in attacking this target because of its proximity to heavily populated areas. Nam Dinh is known to have been struck by many other sorties -- perhaps as many as 400 -- which combined caused only 286 casualties. This casualty rate is not excessive and is about equal to the Rolling Thunder average for strikes on fixed targets. Furthermore, at least five of the US-reported raids were apparently carried off without any significant civilian casualties. Although these raids were against such

major targets as the POL storage and railroad yard and involved large amounts of ordnance, the North Vietnamese did not even refer to them in their propaganda statement even though the statement mentions raids in which as few as one person was killed.

The case of Nam Dinh supports the conclusion that major air strikes can be carried off against targets on the outskirts of major North Vietnamese cities without prohibitive civilian casualties or damage. However, targets which directly border on or are in the midst of heavily populated areas cannot be struck without accepting the risk of substantial casualties and damage, despite enemy efforts to evacuate a sizeable portion of the civilian population. *(Front 2)*

The North Vietnamese have carefully distorted US target intentions; attacks on the Nam Dinh Transshipment Facility and the Nam Dinh POL Storage Area were reported as attacks on workers' housing and dikes. No mention was made of attacks on the Thermal Power Plant, the POL Storage Area, the Railroad Yard, or the Transshipment Facility. In addition, no mention was made of heavy anti-aircraft defenses. *probably believe such propaganda - they* Nam Dinh citizens are unlikely to perceive a small river port area, an electric power plant, or a textile mill as being military targets; the damage caused by the 14 April 1966 raid would not likely be interpreted as *a* bombing error due to the distance from clearly identifiable military targets. *(Front 2)*

Similarly, substantial civilian casualties were the result of strikes on the Phy Ly railroad yard and port facilities, both narrow targets in the midst of the heavily populated downtown area.

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Selected Air Strikes Against Nam Dinh, 1965-66

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| Date of Strike | | Target | | | | Casualties |
|---|--------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|------------------------|
| As reported by US | As reported by NVN | As reported by US | As reported by NVN | Ordnance | | |
| 28-29 Jun 1965 | 28 Jun 1965 | Power Plant | Textile workers' housing | 15x250# | | 10 killed, 12 wounded |
| 2- 4 Jul 1965 | NR | POL Storage Area | NR* | 9x1000# | | NR |
| 2- 4 Aug 1965 | 4 Aug 1965 | Power Plant | NR | 44 Bullpups 38x2.75" Rockets | | NR |
| 12-15 Sep 1965 | 12 Sep 1965 | POL Storage Area | Textile Complex | 86x250# | | 6 killed, 28 wounded |
| 13 Apr 1966 | 14 Apr 1966 | Transshipment Facility | Hang Thao St. (Silk St.) | 8x2000# | | 49 killed, 135 wounded |
| 28 Apr 1966 | NR | Railroad Yards | NR | 13x1000# | | NR |
| 13 May 1966 | NR | Railroad Yards | NR | | | NR |
| 18 May 1966 | 18 May 1966 | Railroad Yards | Hoang Van Thu St. | 116x500# | | 13 killed, 11 wounded |
| 31 May 1966 | 31 May 1966 | Railroad Yards, Transshipment Facility | Dikes | 121x250# | | NR |
| 12 Jun 1966 | NR | Railroad Yards | NR | 76x250# | | NR |
| NR ** | 4 Jul 1966 | NR | NR | NR | | 1 killed, 11 wounded |
| NR ** | 14 Jul 1966 | NR | Dikes | NR | | NR |
| NR ** | 20 Jul 1966 | NR | Dikes | NR | | NR |
| NR ** | 30 Jul 1966 | NR | Phu Long Hamlet (NE of Nam Dinh) | NR | | 12 killed, 10 wounded |
| NR ** | 31 Jul 1966 | NR | Dikes | NR | | NR |
| 16 Aug 1966 | NR | POL Storage Area | NR | 6Bullpups | TOTAL | NR |
| ** Statistics of unreported strikes against Nam Dinh are incomplete dates. However, these lists do not include smaller armed reconnaissance strikes. | | | | 91 killed, 207 wounded | | |

*Not Reported

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